TEMPORARY EXHIBITION

MEXICO: FANTASTIC IDENTITY, 20TH CENTURY MASTERPIECES

FEMSA COLLECTION

Manuel Álvarez Bravo, *Frida Kahlo at Manuel Álvarez Bravo's Studio* (detail), 1930.
FEMSA Collection. © Colette Urbajtel/ Archive Manuel Álvarez Bravo, S.C.

MEXICO: FANTASTIC IDENTITY, 20TH CENTURY MASTERPIECES FEMSA COLLECTION

October 10 - November 12, 2018

Galleries A and B

Curator: Emma Cecilia García Krinsky

Artistas: Agustín Lazo, Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Alice Rahon, Ángel Zárraga, Antonio Ruiz "El Corzo", Arnaldo Coen, Bernard Silberstein, Brian Nissen, Carlos Mérida, Carlos Orozco Romero, Cordelia Urueta, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, Fernando García Ponce, Flor Garduño, Frida Kahlo, Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, Gabriel Figueroa, Gerardo Murillo "Dr. Atl", Graciela Iturbide, Guillermo Meza Álvarez, Gunther Gerzso, Héctor García, Hugo Brehme, Jean Charlot, José Clemente Orozco, José Luis Cuevas, Joy Laville, Juan O'Gorman, Juan Rodrigo Llaguno, Juan Soriano, Kati Horna, Leonora Carrington, Lilia Carrillo, Lola Álvarez Bravo, Lucienne Bloch, Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Manuel Felguérez, Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, María Izquierdo, Olga Costa, Paulina Lavista, Pedro Coronel, Pedro Friedeberg, Peter Stackpole, Remedios Varo, Roberto Montenegro, Rodolfo Morales, Rodrigo Moya, Rogelio Cuéllar, Roger von Gunten, Rufino Tamayo, Tina Modotti, Ursula Bernath, Vicente Rojo, Xavier Guerrero

This exhibition brings together master works of Mexican art and follows the different schools, movements, and trends that developed in the country throughout the 20th century. The exhibition starts with a large-scale painting by José Clemente Orozco followed by a group of works by, amongst others, the muralist masters Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, as well as by some of the most important figures of the Mexican School of Painting. Along with these pieces concur the avant-garde movements of the last century and the so-called Rupture movement that, towards the second half of the 20th century, spearheaded abstraction, geometrism, and other forms of visual expression. This exhibition is enriched by a group of portraits of the artists themselves carried out by prominent photographers in Mexico at the time.

From the European Experience to the Mexican School of Painting

During the first half of the 20th century, Mexican painting was still heavily influenced by the European Academia. Both Ángel Zárraga and Diego Rivera received scholarships from the Mexican government to sojourn in the Old Continent.

When the Mexican Revolution ended, in 1921, José Vasconcelos became the Minister of Education and boarded an ambitious cultural project throughout the country which included a mass education program, book publishing, and the promotion of culture and the arts, taking the task of rescuing folk arts and pre-Hispanic manifestations, and allowing for new plastic vocabularies mainly reflected in mural painting. Vasconcelos summoned Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco, and invited them to work on the walls of the National Preparatory School, the Ministry of Education and the National Palace, not only to display Mexico's history but also to punctuate the pictorial proposals that intended to cultivate the Revolutionary triumph.

Thereafter, a nationalist fervor characterized Mexican culture. Painting was guided by this tendency, which resulted in a movement best known as Mexican School of Painting, where artists from diverse generations such as Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, Cordelia Urueta, and Olga Costa participated. Many of the country's traditions were depicted in their works devising a didactic and highly influential dissemination of this subject during the first part of the 20th century.

Landscape and Territory

Landscape emerged as an important subject in Mexico by the end of the 19th century, when Italian painter Eugenio Landesio arrived for a teaching position at the San Carlos Royal Academy in Mexico City. His disciple José María Velasco skillfully developed the subject, leaving a prolific legacy to forthcoming generations.

The interest in the Mexican geography is also visible in photographer Manuel Álvarez Bravo's work. He dedicated part of his life to capture the Mexican landscape and left several testimonies of his view of nature. Another recurring theme in Mexican art was the snowy volcanoes. One of the greatest Mexican landscapers was Gerardo Murillo, better known as Dr. Atl. In his time at the Academy, during the *Porfiriato*, Dr. Atl proposed an avant-garde vision of landscape. He also participated in the Mexican Revolution along with Venustiano Carranza and strived to spread Mexican popular art.

Another Route: Avant-Garde Movements

Muralism and the Mexican School of Painting were not the only artistic movements fostered in post-revolutionary Mexico. Some artists participated in the official movement, which they later abandoned, while other sought their own path through a less propagandistic expression drawn by the European avant-gardes. At the end of the 1920s, a group of artists comprised by Julio Castellanos, Agustín Lazo, Carlos Orozco Romero, and Manuel Rodríguez Lozano adhered to the literary group named *Los Contemporáneos*. This movement followed the trends of European vanguards while they channeled their painting towards the creation of a Mexican art.

Although Rufino Tamayo began as a muralist, he also eschewed the propagandistic ideals in order to take a stance bound to international movements. In 1926, Tamayo had his first one-person exhibition in New York and during his stay in the city he encountered and was impressed by the works of Pablo Picasso, Georges Bracque, and Henry Matisse, amongst others. Thanks to long stays abroad, Tamayo became a great colorist and consolidated his style, whose roots can be found in Mexico's ancient cultures.

Fantastic Art and Surrealism

Preceding the arrival of André Breton in Mexico, artists such as Frida Kahlo, Antonio Ruiz "El Corzo," Agustín Lazo, Guillermo Meza, and Juan O'Gorman were addressing subjects related to the fantastic or to a Surrealism that was not yet formally known in the country. From her first pieces, Frida Kahlo lured the audience to participate of her personal -always autobiographical- universe. Her work is practically a diary of her life where she freely expressed her emotions.

In 1936, Antonin Artaud visited Mexico and became friends with María Izquierdo. After seeing her work, he pointed to the fact that it was underpinned by a magical, primitive thought. Certainly, Izquierdo's world was full of magic and traditional Mexican elements that were brought together with great fantasy. Since his first exhibition in Guadalajara, young Juan Soriano established a close relationship with Izquierdo and Lola Álvarez Bravo, who encouraged him to travel to the capital to continue his painting studies. Soriano maintained an intimate friendship with Álvarez Bravo. He was her model and posed for her on several occasions, contributing to the creation of unique images.

The Arrival of European Surrealism

The Spanish Civil War and World War II brought to Mexico a group of people who participated in diverse areas of culture. Amongst them was a group of four women: Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, Kati Horna, and Alice Rahon.

The work of English artist Leonora Carrington is inspired by an internal, personal and magical world full of symbols where esoteric cultures combine with characters of different proportions and materials, anthropomorphic beings which dance or fly and coexist in mysterious harmony. Spanish painter Remedios Varo suggests an oneiric world, where fantastic landscapes and architecture merge with magical characters and objects.

Unlike Carrington and Varo, the French-Mexican artist Alice Rahon -initially a poet- had an affinity for abstraction; she shaped elusive images, almost diluted in colored backgrounds in which she often scribed strokes or added sand and created textures. Hungarian photographer Kati Horna trained several generations of photographers in Mexico and carried out innumerable journalistic reportages; however, it was in her so-called "stolen moments" where she captured fantastic stories.

New Trends in the Mexican Visual Arts: The Rupture

During the 1930s and 1940s, Rufino Tamayo and Carlos Mérida, originally participants of the Mexican muralist movement, began expressing themselves through abstract, geometric forms inspired by folkloric traditions and pre-Hispanic art. They established an unrestricted dialogue with international movements without drifting from a national search for identity.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, strong changes took place in the Mexican visual arts fostered by a variety of reasons: one had to do with the refusal of younger generations to adhere to the canons established by the Mexican School of Painting. On the other hand, many of them were able to travel to Europe after the end of the war, which allowed them to study and learn other expressions and take them back to Mexico. They did not seek a shared style but the ambition of creating a change in Mexican painting united them, consequently initiating a struggle to break the thematic and figurative traditions on art, materialized since the Revolution.

José Luis Cuevas, Manuel Felguérez, Vicente Rojo, Lilia Carrillo, Fernando García Ponce, Joy Laville, Brian Nissen, Arnaldo Coen, and Roger von Gunten assembled the group of younger talents who opened the way, through their proposals, for development of new forms of expression in the Mexican visual arts.

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